

**SITE DESCRIPTION:** Pisgah Ridge/Pilot Mountain supports a continuous matrix of high elevation natural communities on multiple long, rocky ridges and steep coves oriented to the south and southeast from the Blue Ridge Parkway. Areas along the Parkway are dominated by high elevation communities such as Northern Hardwood Forest, High Elevation Red Oak Forest, Spruce-Fir Forest, and examples of Boulderfield Forest. Areas of old growth spruce and hardwoods are present along the upper ridges, on steep slopes, and rocky inaccessible areas at the heads of creeks. The upper slopes and coves are extremely steep and are dominated by cliffs, large boulderfields, and rocky forest communities. Abundant seeps emerge from these cliffs and boulderfields. Lower elevations are characterized by more gentle slopes with Chestnut Oak Forest along ridges and Rich and Acidic Cove Forest along streams. There are several waterfalls of varying size throughout the site, including Daniel Ridge Creek, Courthouse Creek, and Mill Station Creek in particular.

At the highest elevation on Fork River Bald just south of the Blue Ridge Parkway, lies a patch of Heath Bald. This community is dominated by a variety of heath and high elevation shrubs mixed with scattered spruce (*Picea rubens*) and rocky, herb-dominated openings. Typical shrubs and small trees include bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla sessilifolia*), wild-raisin (*Viburnum cassinoides*), witch-hobble (*V. lantanoides*), fire cherry (*Prunus pennsylvanica*), blueberries (*Vaccinium* spp.), Catawba rhododendron (*Rhododendron catawbiense*), clammy locust (*Robinia hispida*), and smooth blackberry (*Rubus canadensis*). Clubmosses (*Dendrolycopodium hickeyi* and *D. obscurum*) and herbs such as cow-wheat (*Melampyrum lineare*) and filmy angelica (*Angelica triquinata*) grow in the occasional openings.

A sizable stand of mature Spruce-Fir Forest (approximately 200 acres) occurs along the Blue Ridge Parkway on Daniel Ridge and below Shuck Ridge. Many large red spruce and regenerating Fraser fir (*Abies fraseri*) grow along with hardwoods like yellow birch (*Betula alleghaniensis*) and beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). The understory is dominated by young Fraser fir and high elevation trees and shrubs such as mountain ash (*Sorbus americana*), fetterbush (*Pieris floribunda*), prairie willow (*Salix humilis*), and southern mountain cranberry (*Vaccinium erythrocarpum*). Typical herbs include Roan Mountain goldenrod (*Solidago roanensis*), whorled nodding-aster (*Oclemena acuminata*), fancy woodfern (*Dryopteris intermedia*), mountain oat-grass (*Danthonia compressa*), wavy hair grass (*Dechampsia flexuosa*), and mountain wood aster (*Eurybia chlorolepis*). Two rare graminoids are found in this community, wretched sedge and Smokey Mountain manna-grass. This community also harbors high elevation summer resident birds like golden-crowned kinglet and red-breasted nuthatch. Both Southern Appalachian black-capped chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus practica*) and brown creeper (*Certhia americana*) likely nest in these forests as well. Unfortunately, despite the overall mature condition of the forest, it is still recovering from the balsam wooly adelgid infestation, and remaining spruce stands have experienced high mortality due to windthrow and blowdowns. Snags and canopy gaps are common. This community frequently mixes with adjacent Northern Hardwood Forest, Heath Bald, and High Elevation Red Oak Forest.

Small patches of Northern Hardwood Forest (Beech Gap Subtype) occur in association with Spruce-Fir scattered along ridge-tops and knobs throughout the site and on Shuck Ridge in particular. Beech Gaps usually have a relatively open understory and shrub layer and contain dense swards of Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*) and other graminoids and herbs. This community has been